

Reflections on the Cosmic Task and its Relationship to the Great Work

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Introduction from Kyle: I'm fascinated by the overlap between Berry's notion of the Great Work and Montessori's Cosmic Task. They each have their own distinct qualities, but the essence of my working theory is that the carrying out of the Great Work of our time depends upon the realization of our Cosmic Task. Here are some quotes that I think illustrate the relationship between these two ideas.

"The Great Work now...is to carry out the transition from a period of human devastation of the Earth to a period when humans would be present to the planet in a mutually beneficial manner" (3).

"As servants of the child, teachers can only help the great work that is being done. Doing so, they will be witness to the unfolding of the human soul and to the rising of a New Human who will not be the victim of events but will have the clarity of vision to direct and shape the future of human society." (Education for a New World, p. 3)

"Human Energy presents itself...[as] a vast process in which the whole mass of the universe is involved. In us, the evolution of the world towards the spirit becomes conscious." ~ Teilhard de Chardin

"In reality there is a single integral community of the Earth that includes all its component members whether human or other than human. In this community every being has its own role to fulfill, its own dignity, its inner spontaneity" (Berry, The Great Work, 4).

"All creatures who live on earth have a cosmic role to play. The maintenance of life on earth depends on many species, each one of which has a special, specific function...Human energy, too, has appeared on earth to undertake and fulfill a specific mission" (Montessori, Education and Peace, 67).

"...the Great Work of a people is the work of all the people. No one is exempt. Each of us has our individual life pattern and responsibilities. Yet beyond these concerns each person in an through their personal work assists in the Great Work. Personal work needs to be aligned with the Great Work" (Berry, The Great Work, 10).

"The education that will lead the way to a new humanity has one end alone: leading the individual and society to a higher stage of development. This concept...becomes clearer if we realize that mankind has to fulfill a collective mission on earth, a mission involving all of

humanity and therefore each and every human being.” She goes on to say that above and beyond the goals and “interests of specific individuals and groups, there is something that involves all mankind and perhaps even the universe itself, creation, cosmic harmony...[and] science may have a predominant role to play in helping us discover this single universal mission” (Montessori, *Education and Peace*, 66).

“Education and religion, especially, should awaken in the young an awareness of the world in which they live, how it functions, how the human fits into the larger community of life, the role that the human fulfills in the great story of the universe, and the historical sequence of developments that have shaped our physical and cultural landscape. Along with this awareness of the past and present, education and religion should communicate some guidance concerning the future.” (Thomas Berry, “The Viable Human,” in *The Great Work*, 71).

“Both education and religion need to ground themselves within the story of the universe as we now know it through our empirical ways of knowing. Within this functional cosmology we can overcome our alienation and begin the renewal of life on a sustainable basis. This story is a numinous revelatory story that could evoke not only the vision but also the energies needed for bringing ourselves and the entire planet into a new order of survival.” (Thomas Berry, “The Viable Human,” in *The Great Work*, 71).

“It is of utmost importance that succeeding generations become aware of the larger story...and the numinous, sacred values that have been present in an expanding sequence over this entire time of the world’s existence.” (Mary Evelyn Tucker & John Grim, ed. *Thomas Berry: Selected Writings on the Earth Community* (New York: Orbis, 2014), 16).

“The sublime mission of modern education is to reveal the true importance of this story for the total range of human and earthly affairs.” (Thomas Berry, “The American College in the Ecological Age,” in *The Dream of the Earth*, 98).

Montessori: “The education that will lead the way to a new humanity has one end alone: leading the individual and society to a higher stage of development...mankind has to fulfill a collective mission on earth, a mission involving all of humanity and therefore each and every human being...Is this mission the predominance of one nation over another?...Industrial or cultural progress? And what will the individual regard as his personal mission?...It would seem that above and beyond these goals, which have to do with the interests of specific individuals or groups, there is something that involves all mankind and perhaps even the universe itself, creation, cosmic harmony. This ‘something’ might be considered as involving a religious ideal. But...science may have a predominant role to play in helping us discover this single universal mission” (Montessori, *Education and Peace*, 66)

“Since education is the true salvation of humanity and civilization, it cannot be restricted to its present limits nor continue in its present form...An education capable of saving

humanity is no small undertaking; it involves the spiritual development of man, the enhancement of his value as an individual, and the preparation of young people to understand the times in which they live” (Montessori, *Education and Peace*, 28, 30).

”It seems as though a new epoch were in preparation, a truly human epoch, and as though the end had almost come of those evolutionary periods which sum up the history of the heroic struggles of humanity; an epoch in which an assured peace will promote the brotherhood of man, while morality and love will take their place as the highest form of human superiority.” Montessori, *Antropologia Pedagogica* (1910)

“It was recently proved, on observing the functions of the animals, that their behavior, their individual mode of acting in the environment, has the purpose not only of maintaining themselves, but above all, of carrying a specific item in the complex task of the upkeep of the Earth and of maintaining harmony on it. (...)

When one observes the generality of this contribution one cannot but wonder about Man. Is humanity the only parasite who lives among useless struggles and immense work merely to keep itself living? (...) It is evident that the cosmic theory must include also man among the agents of creation.” Lecture, India, 1946 (You can find the entire lecture in a Collection of unpublished writings and speeches entitled ”The Child, Society and the World” that last section: Man’s Place in the Cosmos.